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Having a deep interest in the woollen manufactures of this kingdom, I anticipate with great satisfaction a period at which England may look to the remote but valuable colony of New South Wales for a considerable supply of this article, so closely connected with our comforts, affording many of the ornaments of social life, and contributing at once to the strength and the affluence of the country.

D. MACLEAN.

No. II.

HATS OR BONNETS OF BRITISH MANUFACTURE IN IMITATION OF LEGHORN.

THE two last and some preceding volumes of our Transactions exhibit the exertions which the Society has made in order to introduce the manufacture of hats, bonnets, &c. from whole straw, platted in the Italian manner. Hitherto these articles have been made in this country of wheat straw; but as this material is too coarse in its entire state for fine plat, a practice was introduced some years ago of splitting the straw into three or more lengths in order to obtain the requisite fineness. By so doing, however, the strength and flexibility of the straw were so far diminished as to render the fabrics composed of it wholly unequal to enter into competition with those imported from Leghorn, the consequence of which has been that the manufacture of split straw, which was carried on to a great extent and with good profit during the late war, suffered a ruinous

deterioration when trade returned to its old channels on the arrival of peace, and conveyed to the English market hats, &c. of Italian plat far more beautiful and durable than those of our own manufacture.

Under these circumstances the Society imported and distributed seeds of a grass which grows wild in the state of Connecticut, U. S., and of the entire stems of which very beautiful plat is made by the wives and daughters of the New England farmers. The Society also conferred their large silver medal on Mr. Cobbett, for demonstrating the possibility of obtaining fine plat of good colour from the stems of some of our native grasses. In furtherance of this desirable object a premium of the large silver medal or fifteen guineas was offered last year to the person who should produce a hat or bonnet made from indigenous British grass, equal in texture and colour to those imported from Leghorn. For this premium, during the last session, there appeared eighteen claimants: to three of whom the full premium has been granted, and to others such inferior rewards as their respective specimens appeared to merit.

The premium of fifteen guineas was given to *Lucy Hollowell* of Neithrop, near Banbury, for two bonnets manufactured by her of the crested dogs'-tail grass, (*cynosurus cristatus*). The grass was prepared and bleached according to the instructions printed by Mr. Cobbett. Up to February 1824, it appears, from the accompanying certificate, that she has made thirty-five ladies' bonnets and two gentlemen's hats.

The premium of fifteen guineas was given to Mrs. *Morrice* of Great Brickhill, Bucks, for a bonnet made by her of crested dogs'-tail grass.

The premium of *fifteen guineas* was given to *Priscilla Surry* of Harpingden, Herts, for a bonnet made by her of meadow fox-tail grass, (*alopecurus pratensis*).

The sum of *ten guineas* was given to *Betty Webber* of Clatworthy, Devon, for a bonnet made by her of crested dogs'-tail grass.

The sum of *ten guineas* was given to *Mrs. E. Mills* of Bath for a bonnet manufactured by her, as well as for instructing several poor persons in the same art.

The *silver Ceres medal* was given to *Mary Marshall*, mistress of Lady Bernard's school at Bandon, near Cork, for a bonnet made by her of crested dogs'-tail grass.

The sum of *five guineas* was given to the children of the school at Bandon, mentioned in the preceding article, for their proficiency in plaiting under the instruction of Mary Marshall.

The *silver Ceres medal* was given to Messrs. *James* and *A. Muir* of Greenock, for a hat face and thirty score of plat of different qualities. From the letter accompanying their specimen, it appears that they are endeavouring to establish, on a large scale, a manufacture of hats platted and knit in the same manner as those imported from Leghorn. The material which, in their opinion, answers the best, (and of which the specimens sent are formed), is rye straw dwarfed by being grown on poor land. The plaiting is performed by women and children in the Orkneys.

The *silver Ceres medal* was given to *Mrs. Mears* of Durley, Hants, for a bonnet of crested dogs'-tail grass platted under her direction and knit by herself.

The *silver Ceres medal* was given to *Mrs. Venn* of Hadleigh, Suffolk, for a bonnet made of crested dogs'-tail grass.

The *silver Ceres medal* was given to Miss *Mary E. Collins* of Dublin, for a small hat made by her of yellow oat-grass, (*avena flavescens*).

The *silver Ceres medal* was given to Mrs. *Pyman* of Coombs, Stowmarket, for a bonnet made under her superintendence, of crested dogs'-tail grass.

The *silver Ceres medal* was given to Messrs. *Cobbing and Co.* of Bury St. Edmunds, for two bonnets, a fine one made of crested dogs'-tail grass, and a coarser one made of underling wheat.

The sum of *five guineas* was given to Mrs. *E. Bloomfield* of Bury St. Edmunds, for a hat made of crested dogs'-tail grass.

The sum of *five guineas* was given to Mrs. *M' Michael* of Penrith, Cumberland, for a bonnet of grass in part procured from Mr. Cobbett, and in part prepared by herself.

The sum of *two guineas* was given to *Jane Hurst* of Leckhampstead, Bucks, for a bonnet made of bent grass.

The sum of *two guineas* was given to the children of the national school at Nunney, near Frome, for a bonnet made of cats'-tail grass, (*phleum pratense*).

All the specimens mentioned above so far resemble Leghorn bonnets that they are made not of split but of entire straw; and the pattern of the plat, and mode of knitting the edges of the plat together, are the same.

There appear to be three circumstances on which the value of a Leghorn hat depends.

First, the fineness of the plat. This depends on the fineness of the straw; the more slender the straw, the finer, that is, the narrower, will be the plat, and of course the greater will be the number of coils required to form a hat

of a given diameter. If, therefore, a yard of fine plat were as easily made as a yard of coarse plat, (which probably is not the case), yet, as a greater number of yards will be required for a fine than for a coarse hat of equal dimensions, there must necessarily be a corresponding difference in the cost of manufacture.

The straw of most of the grasses is more slender than that of the wheat or rye employed by the Italian platters, and therefore some of the specimens produced in claim of the Society's premium are finer than any Italian plat; but extreme fineness can be obtained only at such a sacrifice of substance and strength as greatly to deteriorate the value of the article. Most of the English specimens, however, have sufficient firmness, with a degree of fineness that, as far as this character goes, entitles them to rank above the average of Leghorn hats.

The second circumstance to be attended to is the evenness and regularity of the plat; which depends in part on the uniform size of the straw made use of, and also on that precision of manipulation which can be acquired only by care, and practice, and natural dexterity. In this respect the real Leghorn is very superior to most of the above specimens, almost all of which present very obvious variations in the size of the plat, an imperfection which will, no doubt, be avoided hereafter by a more careful sorting of the straw.

With regard to the last circumstance, that of colour, although considerable differences are observable in the colour of Leghorn hats as compared one with another, yet each individual hat is as nearly as possible of the same tint in every part. Of the bonnets sent in claim of the premium a very few are uniform in their colour; and these are such

as have been subjected only to the most simple bleaching process, namely, scalding the grass when fresh gathered, and subsequent exposure to the sun's light, and a moderate stoving with sulphur after the bonnet has been made. Several of the specimens sent have been very seriously injured in colour by the injudicious use of oxalic acid, and some are defective from want of sunshine when the grass was laid out after being scalded.

Upon the whole it appears to be satisfactorily proved, that the stems of the crested dogs'-tail grass are a material for plat considerably finer than the average quality of Leghorn; and that the deficiencies in texture and colour, of most of the bonnets produced before the Society, are only such as practice and experience will shortly remove.

The bonnets themselves, after being exhibited at the Society's rooms, were returned to the several candidates, and, in their stead, specimens, a few inches long, were required, in order to be placed in the repository. A few weeks, or months at the utmost, elapsed between the first sending in of the bonnets and the delivery of the specimens; and it is very gratifying to remark that the latter are all of them very considerably better in evenness of plat and in colour than the bonnets to which the rewards were adjudged.